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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 005607

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2012
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PHUM, VT, PGOV, PHUM, VT, VE, VEPREL
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE URGES CHURCH TO PROMOTE VENEZUELAN
DIALOGUE, AVOID POLITICAL ACTIVISM

REF: A. A) CARACAS 3281 B) CARACAS 3415

B. C) POWELL/FROWICK EMAIL 11/12/02

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB. JIM NICHOLSON, REASON E.O. 12958 1.5 (B,D)

SUMMARY

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1. (C) THE HOLY SEE IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE PROSPECT OF CIVIL
VIOLENCE IN VENEZUELA IN THE COMING MONTHS, AND THE POPE
HIMSELF HAS URGED THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS TO "COOL IT" ON
POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND INSTEAD TO ENCOURAGE DIALOGUE. THE
HOLY SEE VIEWED THE BISHOPS' OCTOBER LETTER ENCOURAGING
DIALOGUE, READ IN VENEZUELAN CHURCHES, AS A POSITIVE STEP.
HOLY SEE DIRECTOR OF CARIBBEAN AFFAIRS MSGR. GIORGIO LINGUA
WAS NOT AWARE THAT THE VENEZUELAN CHURCH WAS FACILITATING
POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN ANY WAY OTHER THAN BY PROVIDING A VENUE
FOR TALKS. HE SAID THE HOLY SEE HOPES VENEZUELAN WILL
REFRAIN FROM DANGEROUS STREET PROTESTS AND AN INCONCLUSIVE
CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM, AND INSTEAD MAKE FULL USE OF THE
TIME TO PREPARE FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL RECALL REFERENDUM IN
AUGUST. IN LIGHT OF CONTINUED SUPPORT FOR CHAVEZ AMONG THE
VENEZUELAN POPULATION, LINGUA WAS NOT SANGUINE ABOUT THE
OPPOSITION'S CHANCES OF SUCCESS, EVEN IF THEY CONCENTRATE
FULLY ON ORGANIZING FOR AN AUGUST RECALL REFERENDUM. LINGUA

ACKNOWLEDGED THAT CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP VELASCO GARCIA OF CARACAS HAD BEEN TOO CLOSE TO THE COUP PLOTTERS LAST APRIL. FORMER VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR QUINTANA TOLD AMBASSADOR NOVEMBER 18 HE FEARED A VIOLENT DENOUEMENT IN VENEZUELA. END SUMMARY

LOWERING THE CHURCH PROFILE

2. (C) POLOFFS MET WITH HOLY SEE DIRECTOR FOR CARIBBEAN AFFAIRS MSGR. GIORGIO LINGUA NOVEMBER 7 AND AGAIN NOVEMBER 14 TO DISCUSS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S VIEWS OF THE DEVELOPING CIVIL CONFRONTATION IN VENEZUELA. LINGUA SAID HE WAS WORRIED

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ABOUT THE DETERIORATION OF THE POLITICAL SITUATION, AND INDICATED THAT THE HOLY SEE HAD COUNSELED THE VENEZUELAN CHURCH TO BACK OFF FROM WHAT HAD BEEN AN OVERLY VISIBLE PRESENCE DURING THE APRIL 2002 ATTEMPTED COUP. LINGUA TOLD US THAT WHEN THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS MADE THEIR "AD LIMINA" VISIT TO REPORT TO THE POPE IN JUNE OF THIS YEAR (NOTE: THESE OCCUR ON A REGULAR SCHEDULE, ROUGHLY EVERY FIVE YEARS), THE POPE HAD TOLD THEM TO "COOL IT" ON THEIR POLITICAL ACTIVISM. LINGUA, SMILING, THOUGHT THE MESSAGE FROM THE POPE "MIGHT NOT HAVE SUNK IN." HE ADMITTED THAT CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP VELASCO GARCIA OF CARACAS WAS PERHAPS TOO CLOSE TO THE COUP PLOTTERS, AND DEMONSTRATED POOR JUDGMENT IN PARTICIPATING IN THE CARMONA "INAUGURATION CEREMONY."

3. (C) THE HOLY SEE WOULD PREFER THAT THE VENEZUELAN CHURCH NOT ENGAGE IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS DIRECTLY, BUT RATHER SEEK TO STIMULATE A PEACEFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN VENEZUELA'S POLITICAL ELEMENTS. TO THAT END, THE HOLY SEE, THROUGH ITS NUNCIO, HAD WORKED WITH THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE TO DRAFT A LETTER READ OCTOBER 20 FROM ALL VENEZUELAN PULPITS. LINGUA SHOWED US A SPANISH LANGUAGE TEXT OF THIS LETTER AND SAID IT WAS A CONSTRUCTIVE STEP. THE LETTER MADE AN "ANGUISHED APPEAL" TO THE PEOPLE TO OVERCOME THE MOUNTING TENSIONS IN THE NATION AND CALLED FOR A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. THE BISHOPS REAFFIRMED "THE IMPERATIVE TO AVOID ALL VIOLENCE, WITH ITS FATAL CONSEQUENCES, AND TO TAKE POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD UNDERSTANDING AND AGREEMENTS THAT WILL MAKE COEXISTENCE POSSIBLE." AT THE SAME TIME THE LETTER EMPHASIZED THAT "THERE IS A RIGHT TO GIVE ONE'S OPINION, TO ASSOCIATE, AND TO PROTEST FREELY," AND REMINDED PARISHIONERS THAT IT WAS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE PUBLIC

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SECURITY AND ORDER.

4. (C) ASKED ABOUT THE POLITICAL ROAD AHEAD, LINGUA SAID THE HOLY SEE HOPES VENEZUELAN WILL REFRAIN FROM DANGEROUS STREET PROTESTS AND AN INCONCLUSIVE CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM, AND INSTEAD MAKE FULL USE OF THE TIME TO PREPARE FOR A

CONSTITUTIONAL RECALL REFERENDUM IN AUGUST. POINTING OUT THAT CHAVEZ STILL ENJOYS CONSIDERABLE, THOUGH ERODING, POPULAR SUPPORT, LINGUA WAS NOT SANGUINE ABOUT THE OPPOSITION'S CHANCES OF SUCCESS, EVEN IF IT CONCENTRATES FULLY ON ORGANIZING FOR AN AUGUST RECALL REFERENDUM.

FACILITATING DIALOGUE BUT NO MORE

5. (C) AFTER RECEIVING REF B, WHICH INDICATED A CHURCH ROLE

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AMAD-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	WHA-00
	PERC-00	DS-00	EAP-00	VC-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01
	VCE-00	NSAE-00	IRM-00	EPAE-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02
	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/003W				

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R 190935Z NOV 02
FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 VATICAN 005607

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE URGES CHURCH TO PROMOTE VENEZUELAN
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IN FACILITATING VENEZUELA'S POLITICAL DIALOGUE IN CONJUNCTION WITH OAS ENVOY GAVIRIA, WE CHECKED WITH LINGUA AGAIN TO SEE WHETHER THE HOLY SEE HAD CHANGED ITS APPROACH SINCE OUR PREVIOUS MEETING, AND WHETHER THIS NEW ROLE INDICATED THAWING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND PRESIDENT CHAVEZ. LINGUA DOWNPLAYED THE EXTENT OF THE CHURCH'S ROLE, INDICATING IT HAD ONLY PROVIDED A MEETING SPACE AND HAD NOT MEDIATED ANY OF THE DISCUSSIONS. AT ANY RATE, HE SAID, THE MEETING SPACE AT THE SEMINARY OUTSIDE OF CARACAS PRESENTED LOGISTICAL

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DIFFICULTIES, AND SO THE PARTICIPANTS WOULD NO LONGER MEET

THERE. HE EXPRESSED SOME SATISFACTION THAT CHAVEZ HAD AGREED TO USE THAT FACILITY, BUT INSISTED THAT CHURCH/GOV RELATIONS WERE "NO BETTER AND NO WORSE THAN IN APRIL" (I.E. PRETTY BAD). HE INDICATED THAT CHAVEZ GOONS CONTINUE TO HARASS SOME CLERGY, BUT AS YET NONE HAD BEEN PHYSICALLY HARMED. HAVING SAID THAT, HE BACKTRACKED A BIT FROM HIS EARLIER INSISTENCE ON A HANDS-OFF ROLE FOR THE CHURCH, AND SAID THE HOLY SEE WOULD SUPPORT A FORMAL CHURCH ROLE IN FACILITATING POLITICAL DIALOGUE, "ONLY IF BOTH SIDES FORMALLY REQUEST IT."

6. (C) WE MENTIONED TO LINGUA POLLING DATA THAT INDICATED A MAJORITY OF VENEZUELAN THOUGHT THE CHURCH COULD INDEED PLAY A FACILITATING ROLE. HE WAS SURPRISED, ADMITTING THE HOLY SEE BELIEVES IT HAS ALMOST NO SUPPORT AMONG VENEZUELAN POOR. HOWEVER, HE SAID THE HOLY SEE WOULD STICK WITH ITS ORIGINAL ANALYSIS -- POLITICAL ORGANIZING SHOULD FOCUS ON A CONSTITUTIONAL RECALL REFERENDUM FOR AUGUST NEXT YEAR. IN THE MEANTIME, CHAVEZ' SUPPORT CONTINUES TO ERODE, AND THE MORE HE DEMONSTRATES HE CAN'T DELIVER, THE MORE HIS POPULARITY WILL SLIP. ASKED WHETHER THE NUNCIO MAINTAINS A REGULAR DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION, LINGUA SAID NO MORE THAN HE HAS WITH ANY OTHER ELEMENT OF VENEZUELAN SOCIETY.

7. (C) AT A LUNCH WITH AMBASSADOR, NOVEMBER 18, FORMER VENEZUELAN AMBASSADOR (AND FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE) IGNACIO QUINTANA EXPRESSED FEARS THAT CONDITIONS WOULD CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE IN VENEZUELA. QUINTANA SAID HE THOUGHT THAT CHAVEZ WOULD EVENTUALLY BE TAKEN OUT BY A COUP. IN RESPONSE TO AMBASSADOR'S QUERY WHETHER BLOOD WOULD BE SHED, QUINTANA SAID "YES, UNFORTUNATELY."

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COMMENT

8. (C) THE HOLY SEE FINDS ITSELF IN AN UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATION VIS-A-VIS VENEZUELA. CLEARLY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S RELATIONS WITH POPULIST PRESIDENT CHAVEZ ARE POOR AND RISK GETTING WORSE. THE HOLY SEE, WHICH RETAINS VIVID INSTITUTIONAL MEMORIES OF LEFTIST SUPPRESSION OF CLERGY IN SPAIN AND MEXICO, WOULD NEVER WISH TO SEE RELATIONS DETERIORATE TO THE POINT WHERE THE CLERGY AND THE FAITHFUL WERE AT RISK OF PHYSICAL HARM. NONETHELESS, THE HOLY SEE WOULD JUST AS CLEARLY PREFER TO SEE CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS IN VENEZUELA RETURN TO THE SITUATION THAT EXISTED IN THE PRE-CHAVEZ ERA. LINGUA WAS ACUTELY AWARE OF IRONY OF THE CHURCH'S LACK OF SUPPORT AMONG THE POORER CLASSES IN VENEZUELA -- AND OF CHAVEZ' PUBLIC ACCUSATION LAST JANUARY THAT THE CHURCH WAS A "CANCER ON VENEZUELAN SOCIETY" BECAUSE OF ITS ASSOCIATION WITH THE "OLIGARCHS." RECALLING THAT CHAVEZ' OUTBURST WAS IN RESPONSE TO THE PAPAL NUNCIO'S ANNUAL GREETING ON BEHALF OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, LINGUA ONLY HALF-JOKINGLY SAID THE HOLY SEE WAS WORRIED ABOUT WHAT REACTIONS WOULD BE TO WHAT THE NUNCIO WOULD SAY THIS COMING

JANUARY.

9. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: THE CONTINUED ACTIVISM OF THE VENEZUELAN CLERGY IN THE FACE OF THE POPE'S CAUTION DOES NOT SURPRISE US. EVEN THE POPE HAS LIMITED SWAY OVER WHAT A BISHOP DOES IN HIS OWN DIOCESE, UNLESS HIS POLITICAL ACTIVITIES DIRECTLY THREATEN THE DOCTRINE AND MORALS OF THE
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CATHOLIC CHURCH OR THE HOLY SEE'S FOREIGN POLICY. WE WOULD WELCOME EMBASSY CARACAS'S ASSESSMENT OF HOW RESPONSIVE TO THE POPE'S INSTRUCTIONS THE VENEZUELAN BISHOPS HAVE BEEN. FROM WHERE WE SIT, THEIR OCTOBER 20 LETTER TO PARISHIONERS SEEMS AN EFFORT TO MEET THE POPE AT LEAST HALFWAY.
NICHOLSON

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